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Nathan Jessee

*University of New Orleans*

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Alternative Literacies, Resistance, and Spatial Representations in The Do-It-Yourself (DIY) Culture  
of Zine Publication in New Orleans

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
In partial fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the degree of

Master of Science  
in  
Urban Studies  
Urban Anthropology

by

Nathan Jessee

B.A. University of New Mexico, 2007

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## Abstract

Zines are small circulation media that amateurs make and distribute. Inspired by both the lack of ethnographic research on the do-it-yourself (DIY) culture of zine-making in urban studies and the growing interest in ethnographically oriented research in literacy studies, rhetoric, and linguistics this research explores the people, places, and practices behind zine publication in New Orleans, Louisiana through participant observation at two specialized loci—the Iron Rail and punk shows—as well as semi-structured interviews with people who make, distribute, and consume zines.

This research argues that zine-makers use zines to reinterpret urban space in search of an authentic relationship with the city. They then share these interpretations with others who participate in DIY punk culture. In doing so, zine-makers refuse conventional rules developed for classroom literacy and resist capitalism in their zines' content and in their methods of publishing by both building on local knowledge and opposing corporate media.

Keywords: zines, alternative literacies, resistance, spatial discourse

## Chapter 1: Researching Zines and Zine-Makers

### The Social Life of Zines

#### *Locating Zines*

Huge beams of sun pierce through large windows near the roof of the ARK—a drafty warehouse on Marigny Street and Decatur just down river of the French Quarter in New Orleans, Louisiana. Dust drifts through the air like plankton floating in a strong current and lands on a low bookshelf. The air is stale and swampy just like outside in the muggy springtime heat. This is the Iron Rail, an *infoshop* made from three makeshift walls on the right side of the ARK. Infoshops are hybrids of book and music stores, libraries, and community centers. The Iron Rail is self described as nonprofit and has been collectively run by volunteers since December 2003. It houses radical and independently published media including books, music, and news. Infoshops like the Iron Rail not only serve as nonprofit media centers, but also as community centers for people who need a place to organize projects such as radical organizations, protests, or demonstrations.

Collective members of the Iron Rail discuss the organization of space, rent, programs, and projects at weekly collective meetings. At the meetings, the volunteers strive for consensus on each course of action or policy decision, but when that is difficult a topic may be discussed over the course of many meetings with an ambiguous decision being made. Perusing the aisles one will begin to notice an array of pamphlets scattered on racks, tables, and in shelves known as *zines*. Zines are a form of nonprofit, small circulation, amateur media written, published, and often consumed by the people who make them. Zines are publicly distributed but they do not abide by copyright laws in their creation.

Zines in the Iron Rail are either sold or part of the library. A table near the front entrance of the infoshop displays zines made locally in New Orleans. Some of them are free, while others can be bought for one to five dollars. The New Orleans zines are near the entrance because they are considered one of the more important items in the infoshop. The Iron Rail highlights them by making them the first thing that visitors see when they walk into the place. Another rack along a makeshift wall of the infoshop has zines from other locations for sale.

Also in the Iron Rail is the Above Ground Zine Library. The library contains hundreds of zines from around the world that cannot be taken out of the infoshop, because it would be very difficult if not impossible to find backup copies. Robb Roemershauser started the Above Ground Zine Library in a warehouse where young punks lived on Banks Street in 2002. Hurricane Katrina dismantled the living situation at the Banks Street Warehouse so Robb moved the zine library to the Iron Rail where he continues to maintain it. The Iron Rail recently opened an “uptown annex” at the Hey! Café. Hey! Café has a small media depot that serves as an Iron Rail satellite selling records, zines, and other punk material.

Zines exist in other, more unexpected places as well. *The Party’s Over: Beyond Politics, Beyond Democracy* is an interesting zine because I found a stack of them in the newspaper bin that usually holds the University of New Orleans newspaper, *Driftwood*, on the school’s campus. This is an example of how zines straddle the gap between private and public. This invasive distribution of zines; that zines are available for free or trade; and that many people who make them disregard copyright laws—sometimes even explicating this in the zine by specifying that the contents of the zine are *copyleft* or available for use in any

capacity or form—are all articulations of zines as a public media. Invasively distributing zines, like *The Party's Over*, is about occupying places that are designated for another type of media in order to reach out to a broader public than just the people who would attend infoshops.

At homes and in yards during parties are other places where people distribute and consume zines. At one house show in the Upper Ninth Ward, the yard was littered with dogs wrestling each other; small jungles of overgrown weeds and miscellaneous items stolen from nearby dumpsters; some young musicians sluggishly moved instruments to the part of the lawn most conducive to dancing while people sitting in circles passed around bottles of whiskey and laughing. Beneath the only light in the yard sat a table, upon which someone arranged a *distro*.

Distros are temporarily assembled at houses, bars, empty lots, coffee shops, and parks during gatherings. Distros offer non-fiction and fiction books, cds, tapes, movies, clothing, screen printed posters, flyers, and zines for purchase or trade. Through distros, ideas that are not sanctioned by mainstream corporate media or the state are exposed, developed, discussed freely and publicly, but also temporarily. At the house show in the Upper Ninth Ward the theme of the distro was environmental activism. After the event is over, the punks take their dogs, their zines, and their music; the yard becomes a yard again. Every week places like cafés, bars, and living rooms are turned into show spaces and *DIY* values flourish through distros with zines and literature, music, and discussion until the show is over and the space returns to its alternate personality. DIY means “Do-It-Yourself” and it is the driving imperative of the culture surrounding zines. It is considered a call to action for people to create their own activities, histories, fashions, and spaces. Participants

of DIY culture are highly critical of mass mediated messages and corporate sponsored activities, events, news, and political perspectives.

### *History of Zine-Making*

Most research suggests that zine-making evolved from science fiction fan literature or “fanzines” of the 1930s and 1950s (Duncombe 1997, 6; Voß 2008, 4-5; Piano 2007, 309). Science fiction fanzines were a way for the fans to network with each other, share stories, and critique the genre. This act of production on the part of the consumer or fan is paramount in understanding the ethos of zine-making. The next historical moment in the development of zines is the emergence of punk rock music in the 1970s. Punks created loud abrasive music and ignored popular trends of mainstream music. In the 1980s people involved in the punk scene began printing fanzines to discuss punk rock music and its infrastructure—shows, record labels, tours, venues. By the early 1990s the fanzine became the zine as it contained personal stories rather than simply expressions of punk fan culture. The Riot Grrrl movement popularized and politicized zines at the end of the 1980s and into the 1990s.

For this research, I distinguish current zine production in New Orleans from a general underground press in New Orleans because in addition to the values, meanings, and objectives, the discursive, and material forms of other types of informal publications (such as political pamphlets or social justice movements publications) are much different from those of zine publication. According to Darlene Fife, the editor of *NOLA Express*—a 1960s radical newspaper published in the French Quarter—the paper was involved with political groups surrounding the anti-war movement like the Movement for a Democratic Society (MDS), which was the local chapter of the Students for a Democratic Society with a



slight alteration of the name because none of the members were students (2000, 5); anti-draft organizations like the Women Strike for Peace (13); and Communist and Trotskyite groups such as Progressive Labor and the Spartacists (6). Zines are much less frequently about political movements than they are individuals who politicize their everyday lives.

Although anti-war and political activists still print pamphlets in New Orleans, for example Joanna Dubinsky's Solidarity Press publication, *The War at Home: New Orleans After Katrina* or Indymedia publications. For the purposes of this research they are not considered zines for two main reasons. First, institutions rather than individuals publish these types of pamphlets. Although there are collaborative zines, it is more common that a single person establishes the content, collates, makes copies, and—at least initially—distributes the zine. Secondly, the kind of publications that emerges from social movements often seek to disseminate utilitarian ideas rather than personal stories. The format and aesthetics of the expression itself, in social movement publications, are often less important than the communication to a broader audience. According to Fife, for example, the *NOLA Express* resisted the term “underground press” in order to seem more relevant (2000, 43). Due to these differences between zines and other types of “underground publications” it is more ethnographically useful to understand the cultural lineage of zine-making through science fiction fandom and punk than a history of underground publishing for social change.

### *Zine-Makers*

Often the people who make zines are introduced to them through the punk scene. People who participate in punk typically do so between their mid-teens to their mid-thirties. Although punks are often high school or college educated and come from middle

class economic backgrounds, they often exhibit aspirations of downward economic mobility, preferring to not participate in a competitive culture they resent. Many punks reject formal education in their late teens and get service industry jobs or choose poverty, rejecting what Duncombe observes as a “meritocracy” where people who choose to compete in their professional development receive the benefits of “power, wealth, and media representation” (1997, 20). Punks seek alternatives to the competition and consumption that mainstream capitalist society values. “One need no longer be merely a passive consumer of media,” zine-makers Mike Gunderloy (founder of the zine *Factsheet Five*) and Cari Goldberg Janice exclaim in the introduction to their book, *The World of Zines*. “Everyone can be a producer” (1991: 3).

The punk scene, however, is criticized as being a white and male dominated subculture where women and people of color face the same pressures and types of oppression that they do in mainstream culture (LeBlanc 1999). Although white male punks make zines, it would be difficult, however, to extend that criticism to zine publication. Within punk, women and people of color often use zine publication to force changes within the punk scene so that it becomes more inclusive (Rosenberg and Garofalo 1998; LeBlanc 1999; Piano 2007).

The punk women in New Orleans also embrace zine publication as a way to force both material and rhetorical change within the punk scene. Every Thursday evening at the Iron Rail is “ladies’ night” where “women, girls, and female-identified persons” only are allowed to use the space.<sup>i</sup> During ladies’ nights, women organize skill-sharing events on making crafts and zines, film showings, and discussions on topics decided upon by those who attend. No More Fiction is an event promotion collective that focuses on organizing

punk events in New Orleans where at least one person in each performance is queer or female. Osa, who makes the zine *Shotgun Seamstress*, started No More Fiction to “have DIY/punk shows that are welcoming to everyone regardless of gender, sexuality, race, ability.”<sup>ii</sup> People often set up distros with zines at No More Fiction events.

Many people who make zines consider themselves artists; however, they also claim that anyone can be an artist. The term zinester is sometimes used to describe people who make zines (Duncombe 1997) though this term is contested, because people who make zines think of the activity as something that anyone can do, and not just for a certain type of person. Frequently the craftiness, imagery, writing, or collating takes priority depending on the individual who makes the zine, thus an author’s zine could look much different than a photographer’s zine. For the purposes of this research I refer to those who make zines as zine-makers, highlighting the action of making the zine.

As artists and punks, many zine-makers that have downwardly mobile economic aspirations attempt to live on the fringes of mainstream culture and avoid work and the formal economy. Many zine-makers around the country live in cheap or squatted housing in impoverished or lower-income inner-city neighborhoods. Punk houses are collectively run houses with many people dwelling in them. Often these people are traveling as well as residents. These houses—typically called punk houses—host shows, zine libraries, and/or distros.

### *Zine Genres*

People constantly have problems trying to define what a zine actually is. The webzine “Zines and the Web” describes defining zines like defining *jazz*. “One can offer plenty of examples and generalized descriptions, but sooner or later you’re going to run

across an exception. And that's fine, because ignoring the rules is what zines and jazz are all about." It is difficult to make generalizations or classify zines according to their content or style, because they are about many different types of topics and come in a wide variety of shapes, sizes, and forms. When people do try to define them they usually include a disclaimer that highlights their differences. Most zines have very small pressings depending on access to printing resources. Duncombe estimates the average to be somewhere near two hundred and fifty per issue (1997, 12). The fact that zine-makers circulate such a small number of their zines permits almost complete control of zines' aesthetics and distribution to the person who makes them.

Although zines with larger circulation, such as *Factsheet Five* and *Slug & Lettuce*, have a newsprint format because it can save the zine-maker money, New Orleans zines are handcrafted—thus maintaining their diversity. Zines like *Trash Island*, *The Nose Knows*, *Keep Loving Keep Fighting*, or *Homeward* offer a wide array of color arrangements and collating styles. *Trash Island* has a brightly colored orange front and back cover with black print on white pages within it, while others—such as *The Nose Knows* and *No Gods, No Mattress*—are black and white.

While many zines are bound with staples, thread, glue, yarn, or simply folding, some zines are not distributed as pamphlets at all. One New Orleans author, Ethan Clark, wrote one of his first zines about the sea. He put the zine in bottles, removed the labels to the bottle, and replaced them with homemade stickers. Other zines are distributed on the internet in the form of webzines, in envelopes and other creative containers. The content of zines is also diverse. *Keep Fighting, Keep Loving* is autobiographical, while *Trash Island* is a fictional comic strip about people living in a dump. Some zines, however, lack words

completely, for example, Anna Virginia's *GUTTER PUNKS* is a flipbook of someone playing with a ball. Although zines-makers highlight and encourage differences, they often use broad categories to describe their zines. For the purposes of this research, there are four main categories that are not exhaustive; however, most zines exhibit traits from one or more of these categories at a time.

The four categories are how-to zines, personal or perzines, fanzines, and review zines. How-to zines are all about explicitly sharing information on building useful appliances, making art, fixing bikes, or DIY health practices. Personal zines contain personal narratives from the everyday life of the zine-maker. Personal zines share different types of experiences, from traumatic events to mundane anecdotes. Fanzines are like the science fiction fanzines of the past. They explore the intellectual and material culture surrounding art, punk, and other subcultures. Review zines are zines that discuss other zines. People can typically order zines from review zines, as they are like distros in the form of a zine. Many zines overlap in their categorization. Personal zines, for example, often contain interviews with another zine-maker or instructions on how to do or make something.

### *Zine Distribution and Consumption*

Zine-makers distribute zines either through the mail, directly to an individual, to infoshops, to distros, or to review zines. People who participate in the punk scene spend money at infoshops or distros where zines usually cost one or two dollars. If the distribution occurs through the internet, the zine price is usually the cost of shipping. It is also common for people to trade zines for other zines or other punk matter (such as

records or patches). People who do not participate in punk receive zines by accumulating them, in the same way that I found *The Party's Over: Beyond Politics, Beyond Democracy*.

The methods that people use to distribute or acquire zines and the value of the zines shifts depending on the location and social setting through which the transfer is happening. At a punk show it is acceptable to ask a zine-maker to trade a patch or some other object for a zine. At a show it is also likely that the zine-maker will offer the zine for free, whereas at an infoshop the people volunteering expect the person who wants the zine to pay the amount shown (which is sometimes nothing).

## Methodology

### *Research Design*

According to Bob Ostertag's book, *People's Movements, People's Press: The Journalism of Social Justice Movements*, underground media should only be understood within a social context and with an awareness of the cultural objectives of those who produce that media, because the rules and structural constraints are not the same across social movements (2006, 167-168). Essentially, something like *Freedom Press*—a five issue mimeographed anti-war political pamphlet published in New Orleans in 1966 by Dottie Nance would draw from a very different cultural situation—with different time-period aesthetics and politics—than a personal zine from New Orleans today. The culture in which a social movement is embedded manifests in the forms and content of their publications as well as in the tools and techniques used to distribute the material.

Even another informal publication from the same time in the same city—like *NOLA Express*, an anti-Vietnam War publication put out in New Orleans from December 1968-January 1974—could be dramatically different in the goals, aesthetics, or content than

other publications from the same time. Darlene Fife recalls regarding the content of *NOLA Express*, “This combination, or rather interconnection, of art and revolution made us unusual if not unique in the underground press” (Fife 2000, 4). Following Ostertag’s suggestion, it was important to approach this research with a constructivist epistemology—assuming that the participants construct the meanings involved in their cultural production—to better understand the specific productions and mechanics involved in the DIY publishing of zines and zine-maker culture.

Although making zines is not typically part of a social movement, Ostertag’s insights were useful in planning this research, because zines are a print material that is heavily embedded in a very vibrant and particular subcultural milieu—DIY punk. Duncombe understands DIY as a form of *cultural resistance* meaning culture “is used, consciously or unconsciously, effectively or not, to resist and/or change the dominant political economic and/or social structure” (2002, 5). Practices, such as making zines, are shared among DIY punks for the purposes of social change on various scales, but typically the aim is to incorporate political, social, and economic resistance into everyday life by exploring alternatives to the various power regimes that dominate the mainstream.

For this research I share Leblanc’s definition of resistance as political behavior or intent based on “a subjective account of oppression (real or imagined), an express[ed] desire to counter that oppression, and an action (broadly defined as a word, thought, or deed) intended to counter that oppression” (Leblanc 1999, 18). Following Leblanc, the more robust definition of resistance that she provides lends itself to ethnographic inquiry as to account for subjective meanings through semi-structured interviews and patterns of behavior through observed actions.

In addition to issues of validity in meanings, there was a spatial element to this research that I needed to address when designing this project. According to Judith Garber (2009), dividing urban space into simply material and discursive dualisms enforces “modernist, patriarchal dualisms and related to hierarchies related to aspects of reality, truth, and significance” which “serves to deny its discursive, symbolic, and subjective aspects (2009, 213). Feminist and queer interpretations of urban space reject a material/discursive dichotomy. The interpretations of urban space in zine-making lend themselves to Garber’s theory, because by looking at a spectrum of forms (including discursive, symbolic, material, and subjective) rather than the more quantitative ways that others have explored the spatial force of urban subcultures, one can obtain a more robust view of the specific characteristics of DIY practitioners and the way they rely on networks and informal temporary community loci (such as squats and show spaces) and a researcher can explore the interplay between both spatial forms of practices such as zine distribution and social meanings of spatial representations within the zines’ content. A heavily material and quantitative analysis—such as Castells (1983) of the San Francisco gay community and its social and spatial impact—would not provide the explanation that I hoped to discover in this thesis because DIY punk subculture relies so heavily on networks and temporality.

Thus, this project was conceived as ethnographic in order to both hear the experiences of people who use zines and to interpret the role of zines in their social environment in search of the meanings behind participants’ practices. I employed participant observation at places where zines are located in New Orleans, Louisiana from spring 2009 until spring 2010. These places included the Iron Rail bookstore and Above Ground Zine Library, warehouse parties, house shows, punk shows at bars and cafes, and



media expositions such as the New Orleans Bookfair on November 7, 2009 at Frenchman Street and the Alternative Media Exposition on March 21, 2009 at the Contemporary Arts Center. This allowed me to observe the specific physical environments in which zines are located.

In addition to participant observation and the informal discussions included in that observation, this research was built upon semi-structured interviews with people involved in various aspects of zine publication. Interviews with people who make, distribute, and consume zines were important for listening to the priorities and meanings related to zines within DIY punk culture. I talked to people who table at, promote, or attend shows where zines are located to hear different perspectives on zines and their role in the places where they exist—such as Iron Rail, punk shows, and in the broader DIY punk community. My research also included a review of the literature (both formally and informally published) focusing on zines. A review of informally published literature was useful because often zines talk about other zines. Zines also frequently contain interviews with people who make other zines, which can be useful data..

### *Identifying places to observe*

I have been involved in the punk scene for ten years. I have promoted and attended shows, lived in punk houses, and read zines. Currently, I host a zine library in my house which people use while shows are happening in my living room. For this research I heard about many shows, distros, and zines through personal acquaintances; however there are ways that anyone who is looking can find zines and zine-makers. In order to find places where zines are located one can frequent the Iron Rail's bulletin boards where there are numerous flyers for upcoming events. These flyers describe the type of event as well as its

location. There are also flyers in coffee shops, on telephone poles, and record shops. I attended events that seemed like they may have a distro. For example, I found a flyer for the show and environmental activism presentation and thought it seemed like an event at which there would be some sort of material—such as zines or other media—to share the presenters' ideas.

Sometimes volunteers from The Iron Rail set up distros at more mainstream concerts in order to publicize the infoshop to new people. It is hard to predict when this will happen as it depends on when a volunteer is willing to do so and if the concert promoter permits the distro. Other ways to find out about events are through the noladiy.org website, which has an events listing calendar. Although the website was started by participants of the DIY punk scene, it has gained a broader constituency and now it promotes local DIY events from various subcultures. At every show there are typically people handing out flyers to future events, thus the more shows that one attends, the more shows he or she knows about.

### *Recruiting Interviewees*

Recruiting the people who appear in this document involved asking people at shows, the media expositions, and at the Iron Rail. In many cases, I heard about someone who would be interested in participating in this research project during interviews with other people. Occasionally, I contacted the zine-maker by e-mailing the address on the zine. Zine-makers often encourage this by publishing their contact information in their zines. Introducing oneself at an event, meeting people through mutual acquaintances, and using the contacts presented on zines themselves are all ways of establishing relationships with people who use zines.

I chose the participants I did for their varying involvement in DIY punk and zine-making. Some of the people I talked to were less involved in punk and more involved in DIY publishing, while others would consume zines at punk shows or volunteer at the Iron Rail. Many of the zine-makers I contacted were too busy to participate in interviews but had informal discussions about zines with me at shows and parties. The goal in selecting participants was to get hear what people who are involved in zine publishing in different ways had to say. I also wanted a broad enough demographic to be able to distinguish shared experiences of zines from a unique experience.

### *Data Analysis*

I transcribed the interviews and looked for patterns in the discourse of the participants. Upon first peruse, I ignored all unique qualities of the text in search of the common experience. When a pattern emerged in multiple transcriptions I would make a note of it as shared experience. The patterns in my interviews included the following: 1) creative freedom with no obligation to formal grammatical, spelling, or style conventions of a book; 2) learning, sharing, constructing, or exposing information or knowledge in a format that would be easily modified by the consumer; 3) that zines are thought to be political by those who use them, because they are produced on a small scale rather than mass produced and broadcasted by corporations; and 4) that zine-makers use zines to rethink the city. Once these patterns emerged I explicitly focused on these themes during subsequent interviews and conversations to listen to how people talk about them.

During participant observation I took notes either during or after the observation took place. While at the Iron Rail, I had ample opportunity to take extensive notes; however at shows, it was much more difficult because of the social nature of the event. During

events I would participate and talk to people about what was happening. After the event I compiled observation notes based on what I observed or heard as well as how I participated. The notes from participant observation were also quarried for patterns. I understood these patterns as the most basic aspects of locating zines. Beyond the patterns were more nuanced insights on how people maintain the flow of zines.

During my analysis of the print culture of zines I employed some language based analysis or discourse analysis to understand zine-makers' ideological approaches to space. I examined the stories of neighborhoods and the city while looking for patterns in the ways that zine-makers articulate spatial relationships. After noticing that many zines discussed neighborhoods, bike rides, traveling, cities, and gentrification, I looked at the differences between these articulations and those formulated through other types of visual and print media.

I also incorporated this observation into my interview questions and informal discussions with people who use zines. The spatial implications of zines seemed so pervasive in my observations that I also incorporated it into the design of my semi-structured interviews. After talking to zine-makers about their spatial representations I realized that there were patterns involving the way that zine-makers identify with their geography that is complimentary to the personalized political discourse in zines.

## End Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Iron Rail homepage, meetings listing, <http://www.ironrail.org> (accessed March 10, 2010).

<sup>ii</sup> This is quoted from a No More Fiction flyer encouraging punks to support No More Fiction shows.

## **Chapter 2: Intellectual Background**

### **Rationale and Significance**

There are two academic contexts to which this research is responding. The first is the study of language at the intersection of media studies, linguistic anthropology, and literacy studies while the second is in urban studies and anthropology. Over the last forty years language based disciplines have converged in both their methodologies and objects of inquiry to develop a demand for ethnographically oriented social science research on the ways people use language in their everyday experiences. In recent education research the formal conception of literacy, as strictly involving reading and writing in the classroom, has been shown as inherently incomplete and often exclusionary in its understanding of what it means to effectively use language. Thus literacy discourse has left the classroom in order to explore the ways that literacy manifests in peoples' everyday lives. These manifestations involve social practices—values, ways of expression, attitudes, and opinions—that emerge as a part of an individual's socialization within a group. The ethnographic approach is crucial to observing and understanding these practices in language use.

The ethnography of language offers insights into how people use language in ways that vary from mainstream formal education (Ward 1971; Heath 1983), how class difference permeates mainstream conceptions of literacy (Stuckey 1990; McLaren 1996), and how the most mundane texts are ideologically driven (Gee 2007). Social science research has begun to quarry the social landscape and find out how various populations use language in order to understand the function of different uses of language for different groups of people, especially those living in populated and diverse urban areas. Zine-making is one activity that has already intrigued ethnographically oriented language research

(Knobel and Lankshear 2001; Piano 2007). This thesis research contributes to the emerging social science literature focused on zine-making and the social practices involved in zine publication by further exploring what zine publication means both to those who make them and to social science research.

The second area in which this research has significance is urban studies. Urban studies research on policy and the effects of policy action in cities are increasingly interested in discourse and rhetorical force (Stone 1989; Hastings 1998; Dikeç 2005). This research is predominantly occupied with mainstream mediated articulations as its focal text, because of the influence that mainstream media and state articulations have on the ways that people respond to and understand civic life. *Narrowcast*—opposite of broadcast—media; however, is becoming more influential as people saturates their daily routine with the act of publishing via blog, mobile phones, or participatory internet media like Flickr, Vimeo, Twitter, or Facebook (Jenkins 2006, 222). People who do not have access to mainstream publishing avenues such as television or radio broadcasting stations can disseminate information, opinions, and ideas like never before.

Narrowcast media has considerable force—which became mainstream news during the protests in Iran just after the June 2009 presidential election controversy. Mobile phones spread images of the demonstrations around the globe and incited public debate on the role of new media (such as text messaging and participatory internet sites) in mobilizing people for political action (Schechtman, 2009; Simpson 2009; Stöcker 2009). Urban research should explore the force of narrowcast publishing, in addition state or corporate mediated articulations for their discursive value. Narrowcast articulations constitute with the same haste and power that mainstream broadcast media does but serve

different functions for different groups of people. Although narrowcast media is a term often used for new hi-tech participatory media, for the purpose of this study, I consider zines to be a narrowcast medium because the people who make them typically circulate less than five hundred copies of a single issue.

Considering the force of zines will contribute to urban studies and social science literature that examines globalization processes such as the flows of finance capital, material, people, and information. Zines not only have content that reflects the opinions, ideas, locations, and experiences of the people who create them, but they also have performative value as being ‘para-urban’ material remnants of individual experiences that move in and out of urban areas—eluding to an underbelly of suburban and urban life that evades direct sunlight by hiding in dilapidated media depots, secret cafés, and the shadows of the mainstream. In my analysis I interpret the methods of distributing zines in hopes to better understand the ideological underpinnings of such distribution practices. An exploration of zines and the practices driving their use will disinter the political significance of an interesting underground subculture.

## Crumbling Monolithic Literacy

### *Theoretical Transformations of Literacy and Zines*

Cutting edge literacy research aims to explain the implications of new technologies and activities on what it means to be literate. Making zines is slowly beginning to strike a chord with literacy researchers (Williamson 1994; Knobel and Lankshear 2001; Aulik 2006). Though zines are often mentioned in this academic area, the research often focuses primarily on either how people use language in zines as isolated from other practices or how zines could be used in the classroom—as Aulik suggests in her article “Zines, Literacy,

and the Adolescent.” Aulik claims that zines are signs of a “respect for *the book*—the traditional text with its long luxurious history.”<sup>i</sup> This suggestion, however, lacks the semantic depth and zines’ relationships to other practices that an ethnographic exploration of the people who use zines could provide and also lacks the theoretical seriousness that the recent history of literacy studies demands.

Throughout the past forty years the study of literacy has evolved beyond focusing on reading and writing in schools or what content will better engage students in academics. While classroom activities are still places for literacy development, the researchers that study language in fields such as linguistics, education, and linguistic anthropology have adjusted their lens to include family socialization and other out of school practices to understand diverse approaches to language use in peoples’ everyday lives. Developing disciplines such as discourse analysis and applied sociolinguistics mark a shift in language study to looking at the social contexts of language-use.

The objective of these fields is to better understand the social aspects of using language, especially how language reinforces, determines, or resists power dynamics among groups of people. Ultimately, out of the wake of these academic trajectories and with the development and widespread use of new technologies—such as personal computers—emerged a new type of literacy studies that searched for literacy in peoples’ everyday behavior, perspectives, and new technologies.

These technologies could be something similar in form to the old tools used in literacy research such as books, pamphlets—or as Aulik reminds us, zines—which all involve text on a page, or they can be very different such as the study of digital literacies (Knobel and Lankshear 2009) or multimodal literacy (Kress 2003). Multimodal literacy



involves interfaces other than print culture/production. According to Kress, prior conceptions of literacy involve reading and writing text on a page whereas now the image or screen is arguably more prevalent of an interface, and this involves a very different semantic logic (2003, 1). While reading print involves an approach reliant on linear patterns of meaning making, reading images involves spatial patterns (Kress 2003, 2-4). In addition to the interpretive activity of making meaning, the new conception of literacy is concerned with discourse.

In the 2007 edition of the book, *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourse*, James Gee discusses the contentious relationship between school-based and home-based ways of using language. Gee draws on many sample texts from classroom research and everyday life showing that the ways people use language is embedded in the social roles or “Discourses [with a capital D]” into which everyone is socialized.<sup>ii</sup> According to Gee, “Discourses are ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing, that are accepted as instantiations of particular identities (or ‘types of people’) by specific groups” (Gee 2007, 3).

It is through this sense of discourse—as social roles—that our use of language is ideological. Theories regarding peoples’ status and power are framed in ways contingent upon the discursive perspective from which an individual is speaking (Gee 2007). This is similar to Paulo Friere’s notion that “language practices among individuals do more than reflect reality, they effectively organize our social universe and reinforce what is considered to be the limits of the possible while constructing at the same time the faultlines of the practical” (McLaren 1996, 158). Friere posed the need for critical pedagogy as a driving force in social change. According to critical educator Peter McLaren, “all knowledge

is fundamentally mediated by linguistic relations that inescapably are social and historically constituted” (1996, 157). The way that people use language is a reflection of the roles that they are playing in society and how historical developments have tendered these roles.

For Gee (2007), those who partake in at least one discourse beyond the immediate family are effectively able to read the social praxis involved in embodying multiple social roles and thus should be considered literate. Each role that a person plays involves a specific literacy that can be researched. Barton, Hamilton, and the Lancaster University Linguistics Department refer to a similar conception of literacy as *situated literacies* (Barton and Hamilton 2000, 8). In the same sense as Gee, literacies are embedded in the social conditions and characteristics of the people that use them. Barton and Hamilton define the social values and themes that form explicit articulations of literacy as *literacy practices* (Barton and Hamilton 2000, 7). Literacy practices are in constant negotiation with peoples’ roles and goals depending on the social groups of which they are a part.

Based upon the plurality of roles and groups that individuals are members of, an equally plural conception of literacy has emerged (Cook-Grumperz and Keller-Cohen 1993; Collins 1995; Daniell 1999). Prior to this, literacy research often involved dichotomies such as “literate vs illiterate, written vs spoken, educated vs uneducated, and modern vs traditional” (Collins 1995). These paradigms are often very ethnocentric and politically problematic. In the article, “Literacy and Literacies,” James Collins presents a dichotomy to end all dichotomies of literacy research. Collins conceptualizes a dichotomy between the old concept of literacy (in which one could evaluate, ‘No, they don’t have it’ or ‘Yes, they

have it') and a world full of many literacies, or effective uses of language that are used in different cultures for different reasons as the only significant dichotomy.

The problem with old models of literacy is that they constitute essential psychological differences between groups based on their reading and writing development (Collins 1995, 76). In the academic literature this is often referred to as "The Great Divide" or "Great Leap" (Collins 1995; Daniell 1999, Gee 2007). Proponents of multiliteracies are very critical of the great leap concept support the notion of literacy as glued to its socio-cultural context. Reading and writing, as they are encouraged in school, are no longer the only legitimate notion of literacy. Rather it is but one manifestation of literacy among many equally legitimate discourses of literacy. Formal reading and writing literacy is however a dominant discourse, meaning that control of it can affect one's social position. Thinking about literacy in terms of discourses opens up social, cultural, and historical realms that were not previously understood in terms of the pedagogical functions involved with social groups' uses of language. Even playing basketball with an afterschool group can be salient for the new literacy studies (Mahiri 1998).

To better understand both the objectives of current literacy research and the proper role of zines in literacy discourse, it is worth introducing the 1971 sociolinguistic classic, *Them Children: A Study in Language Learning* by Martha Ward, where social class was a factor in formal literacy development's exclusion of other situated literacies. Ward's book explores the influence of family socialization to language acquisition in "Rosepoint," St. James Parish, Southeast Louisiana. Ward observed a "discontinuity" between school-based education and home-based education. The school made no efforts to include or know the parents, who in turn, knew very little about what was happening in school or how schools

operated (1971, 91). Due to the inaccessibility of nursery schools and kindergarten a Rosepoint child's first experiences with institutionalized education happened after they are six years old, which is considerably late for language acquisition. According to Ward, "Rosepoint homes use language predominantly for verbal communication rather than writing, thus the school culture is too unnatural for the Rosepoint child" (1971, 91).

The relevance of Ward's book to my point is that socialization through experiences outside of the classroom determines ways that people approach language and these approaches can conflict with the approaches promoted in the classroom. According to some theorists, the state and social elite use language to exclude entire demographics of the population from formal education and opportunities this provides (Stuckey 1991). In *The Violence of Literacy*, Elizabeth Stuckey explains how, in a country where education is often thought of as a pathway to financial and social prospect, the institutionalized promotion of one conception of literacy through the standardization of pedagogy caters to certain demographics that use language in ways that are congruent with the particulars of that conception of literacy.

This social critique is at the foundation of looking outside the classroom, and instead to the various ways in which people approach language use for communication and socialization in their everyday lives. Literacy studies has thus evolved into an inquiry that is much different than how can teachers use the activities in which students participate outside of the classroom as pedagogical tools, but rather what do these practices outside of the classroom mean for the formal conception of literacy used within the classroom. The focus on zines should, thus, not be on how zines can legitimize whatever curriculum or

classroom discourse, but rather how they operate in the environment that they are used. My analysis aims at further understanding zines in this context.

Some language-based research on zines does consider the development of literacy theory. Doreen Piano's article, "Exchanging Life Narratives: The Politics and Poetics of Do-It-Yourself Practices," discusses how zines and the underground press serve to socialize individuals into feminism (2007, 310). In the article, Piano considered zines as "informal spaces of learning" (311) or "nontraditional learning spaces" (314) in which individuals can cultivate knowledge that resists state articulations of exclusion, sexism, or racism. According to Piano the distribution of autobiographical stories by women functions to construct a "collective identity" of feminism in DIY culture (312), offers examples of how race, gender, and class manifest in the everyday experiences of individuals (314), and also generates "an awareness and respect for differences among women" (314). These productions of knowledge constitute literacy because an individual can learn about feminist resistance in the space of zines by reading the stories in them as well as participating in the economy of knowledge and print that supports their circulation.

Lasse Voß comes to a similar conclusion of the function of zines as a tool for socialization in his thesis on New Orleans zines and anarchist identity entitled, "Subcultural Narrative Identity Construction in Personal Zines: The New Orleans Punk Anarchist Scene and the Impact of Hurricane Katrina." Voß identifies a instructive function of zines as performance of anarchist punk identity that embraces DIY culture as a mode of anarchism that is specific to the scene (2008, 62). Literacy and social science research investigates both who is constituted by the process of zine-making and the zines themselves as well as how people use those identities to teach social ways of behaving and thinking.

For example, in “Cut, Paste, Publish: The Production and Consumption of Zines” Michele Knobel and Colin Lankshear are not looking at which groups use zines to socialize members (like Piano and Voß), but rather how zine-makers use language in making zines. Knobel and Lankshear draw from Michel de Certeau’s notion of tactics to describe the social practice of making zines. According to de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, tactical action is “a calculus which cannot count on a ‘proper’ [spatial or institutional localization], nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality...It has at its disposal no base where it can capitalize on its advantages, prepare its expansions, and secure its independence with respect to circumstances” (1984, *xix*). Tactics are thus the ways of making do with less power. Knobel and Lankshear observe that creating zines employs two tactical methods in their construction. One is called *la bricolage* and the other is *la perruque*.

According to Knobel and Lankshear *la bricolage* is defined as the “‘artisan-like inventiveness’ of consumers’s everyday practices” or “poetic ways of making do.”<sup>iii</sup> These are ways that people use what they have or what surrounds them in order to make something of their own or use it in their own unsponsored way. *La perruque* translates from French as “wig” and conceptually it refers to employing *bricolage* at the workplace. As de Certeau philosophizes, “*la perruque* grafts itself onto the system of the individual assembly line (its counterpoint, in the same place), as a variant of the activity which, outside the factory (in another place), takes the form of *bricolage*” (1984, 29). *Bricolage* has had other names. Often referred to as subvertising or adbusting, the DIY scene consistently pays homage to the Situationist International (a group of French anarchists that played an

influential role in the May 1968 riots in Paris) as an important influence for their tactical methods by reproducing their texts.

‘Adbusting’ and ‘subvertising’ are what the Situationists referred to as forms of *détournement*, which translates to ‘hijacking’ or ‘turning around.’ *Détournement* is taking an image or textual element from one publication and reusing it, altering the parts that one does not agree with or using it in contrast with another image or text that renders the stolen element ironic. It is plagiarism. As Situationist founder, Guy Debord, writes in *Society of the Spectacle*, “Ideas improve. The meaning of words plays a role in that improvement. Plagiarism is necessary. Progress depends on it. It sticks close to an author’s phrasing, exploits his expressions, deletes a false idea, replaces it with the right one” (Debord 1995, 145). According to the Situationists the utility of taking and using or ‘making do’ with what is available is the only way for individuals to participate in the construction of new relevant knowledge.

Debord claims, “*Détournement* has grounded its cause on nothing but its own truth as critique at work in the present” (Debord 1995, 146). Knobel and Lankshear understand zines as tactical because the construction and content of zines embody both bricolage and *la perruque* by employing methods of *détournement*, rejecting copyright laws, and being constructed from often stolen resources. Understanding zines in these terms helps to, as Knobel and Lankshear suggest, “move our analyses beyond zines as merely exotic and static artifacts” (Knobel and Lankshear 2001). Knobel and Lankshears’ study on zines has meaningfully influenced literacy studies by inspiring further research on ways that students resisted being considered remedial by employing tactical methods of language use (Gomez et al. 2004).

Knowledge of the trends in literacy theory permits an understanding of zines as the results of social practices that express real concerns within DIY punk culture, moving beyond a consideration of zines as a hook to intrigue rambunctious teenagers into reading and writing during class. Research on zines and literacies often fits a pattern in literacy studies, which is to focus on ‘discourse’ as referring to identity or social roles. The reason why this definition of discourse is possible, however, is because there is an implied group of people behaving or thinking a certain way. This thesis addresses the ways that zine-makers use zines as a tool that functions to socialize across many identities into a relation to knowledge and the city for purposes of resistance to capitalism.

## Zines and Politics

### *Political Perspective of Zine-makers*

Some research explores the impact of zines within DIY culture and broader social structures (Chu 1997; Duncombe 1997; Spencer 2005, Piano 2007). These projects show how zines form communities, sustain discourse unsanctioned by mainstream media, and maintain certain mechanics of DIY culture. In all of these conclusions regarding the role of zines, a central tenant is the notion that zines—and the stories they contain—are political.

In his 1997 book, *Notes from Underground: Zines and the Politics of Alternative Culture*, Stephan Duncombe describes how zines, as I touched on earlier, mark a different way of expressing political views from political pamphlets of the nineteenth century or underground newspapers of the 1960s. Zines—influenced by feminist insights—approach political topics using personal discourse rather than political or utilitarian discourse. According to Duncombe, this manifests in two ways. First, the themes and topics understood as political have, in zines, been expanded to include not only discussions of



polity, government, or states but also the typical interactions of individuals in the places they inhabit—on the street, in the store, in their house, in their bed (1997, 28). The second way, according to Duncombe, that zines insert political discourse into personal discourse is by the perspective that the analysis takes.

Political pamphlets have been written or edited by a single author as far back as the mid eighteenth century with Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*. Political pamphlets in the past, however, used personal voice to explain the public interest in whatever political objective the pamphleteer was striving for, while zines insert the zine makers own experience as the political situation instead of appealing to more abstract utilitarian ideals. According to Duncombe, "Not satisfied merely to open up the personal realm to political analysis, *they personalize politics*, forcing open what OED [Oxford English Dictionary] defines as politics with a personalized analysis (1997, 28). The way that zine-makers understand politics is, following feminist contributions to political discourse, through their personal experiences.

#### *Perspectives of the State and Corporate Media*

In the book, *Seeing like a State*, James C. Scott describes limitations of state power as the result of inherent blind spots in the way that states understand or render legible the societies they govern (Scott 1998, 3). According to Scott this leads to the failure of certain schemes and institutions that try to cater to the needs of their constituents. Scott's analysis of what he calls high modernist urban planning projects such as the work of Le Corbusier accounts for rigid classifications that do not match the actual experiences of the people who live in the city. Brasilia, for example, has outgrown itself and the "unplanned region" is where most of the people live (1998, 129).

A second component of Scott's analysis is that the state's "tunnel vision" affects society as policies and cultural productions are based upon the abstractions created by the distorted state legibility (1998, 5). To illustrate this point Scott draws on the French "door-and-window tax" initiated at the end of the eighteenth century and abolished in 1917, where because the estate tax was determined by the amount of portals in a dwelling—so that the assessor would not have to enter a home—many homes began to have less and less windows and doors in effort to undermine the tax (1998, 47). Scott extends his conclusion to other types of organizations and political actors in addition to the state—like the agents of capitalism:

Large-scale capitalism is just as much an agency of homogenization, uniformity, grids, and heroic simplification as the state is, with the difference being that, for capitalists, simplification must pay. A market necessarily reduces quality to quantity via the price mechanism and promotes standardization; in markets, money talks, not people. Today, global capitalism is perhaps the most powerful force for homogenization, whereas the state may in some instances be the defender of local difference and variety (Scott, 8).

Scott induced his theory regarding the antagonisms between "state legibility" and "local practice" from research on late eighteenth century German forestry practices, high modernist city planning, and the development of French estate tax laws; however, the conclusions are useful for understanding the political significance of zines in relation to corporate and mainstream media. It is important here to define how my research uses the term "local knowledge" and "capitalistic homogenization and simplification" to better explain their relevance to the DIY publication of zines.

## *Local Knowledge*

Michel-Rolph Trouillot makes an important distinction between the terms *locale*, *locality*, and *location* in his book *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World*. Explicating the differences among these terms will be useful for understanding the parameters of what this research means by ‘local’ knowledge. According to Trouillot,

We can see *Location* as a place that has been situated, localized if not always located.

One needs a map to get there, and that map necessarily points to other places without which localization is impossible. We can see *locale* as a venue, a place defined primarily by what happens there: a temple as the locale for a ritual, a stadium as the venue for a game. *Locality* is better perceived as a site defined by its human content, most likely a discrete population. A fishing locality is said to be populated by fishermen and their families... and a cultural area is a locality populated by people who are said to share similar cultures (2003, 122-123).

In his critique of anthropological fieldwork, Trouillot suggests that anthropologists have treated the field as either localities or locales, and not locations—causing a narrow view that lacks the contextual or political depth that ethnographic fieldwork ought to provide. I found that Trouillot’s critique not only helped the way I understood the New Orleans punk scene as the field, but it also helped clarify the different ways that the term “local” might be applied to the knowledge produced and shared in zines.

The ‘local’ in local knowledge, as I use the term, does not always refer to a single location, but rather many locations with the same localities or locales. For the purposes of this research, local knowledge refers to information that is created by the people who use it based on their experiences, and is thus practical knowledge. This is not to say that each

location where “local knowledge” of a certain type manifests is a locale or locality—without a historical and political context—but it does help to explain how zines that span place and time create and share information that is of specific use to a group of people.

Non-local knowledge is produced for non-specific consumption by any group of people. Corporate and state media are examples. Even though it may appear to be local because of the power and pervasiveness of corporate media, this knowledge serves a function to control the reproduction of certain ideas or debates and support political power (Chomsky 1989). Corporate institutions and state agencies disseminate ideas and information to cultivate and mobilize ideological and material support. The fact that media entities are political actors is not a new idea. What is new, however, is that so few people control the means by which most of the world’s population gets its information. Five media conglomerates control eighty-five percent of the media through which most people obtain their news and worldviews.<sup>iv</sup> Time Warner, The Walt Disney Company, Murdoch’s News Corporation, Viacom, and Bertelsmann own most of the world’s media (Bagdikian 2004, 3). The prevalence of the internet and participatory media has given more control to users and cutting edge research from many disciplines focuses on the affects of this; nonetheless, media (even many participatory media systems) has become consolidated under fewer corporate owners.

According to Ben Bagdikian in *The New Media Monopoly*, these corporate empires work together and often have the same individuals serve on multiple companies’ boards of directors simultaneously (2004, 9). These corporate entities also work closely with democratic politicians to reinforce capitalist ideology. Capitalist media conglomerates do this in different ways, for example, by controlling the frequency and nature that President

Ronald Reagan was broadcasted by the mainstream media during his administration or hand delivering conservative literature such as the Rupert Murdoch owned *The Weekly Standard* to high-level politicians like former Vice President Dick Cheney and President George Bush throughout their terms (Bagdikian, 14-15).

In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey discusses the power of capitalists and class politics. “With disproportionate influence over the media and the political process this class (with Rupert Murdoch and Fox News in the lead) has both the incentive and the power to persuade us...” (Harvey 2005, 38). Implicit in Harvey’s observation and explicit in Chomsky and Bagdikian is that the relationship between the corporate media and political elites relies on the collective consumption of the knowledge that mainstream media generates by as many people (with varied interests and experiences) as possible. Corporate media organizes its knowledge and the media through which it is distributed to be easily consumed by simplifying political processes for debate, homogenizing information through the many channels that five collaborating corporate entities control, and cultivating uniform effects in the political perspectives of the status quo.

According to Appadurai the value of all commodities is related to its political and cultural environments rather than based on demand at the point of exchange (1986, 57). The prevalence of capitalist media has less to do with demand for information, and more to do with the media conglomerates and stakeholder politicians’ culturally and politically motivated goals of profit by a broad and diverse population’s easy and ubiquitous consumption of that information. Capitalist legibility is limited by the motivation of accumulating capital, which manifests in simplification and standardization in areas of transport, urban planning—and more relevant here—the mass media (Bagdikian 2004,

260; Castells 2002, 117 published in Susser 2002). According to Bagdikian, “The large media conglomerates do not want greater political and social diversity because it would dilute their audiences and thereby reduce the fees they can demand for the commercials that produce their unprecedented profit levels” (2004, 260).

The DIY publication of zines (and the distribution of local knowledge found in them) is driven by different cultural goals than capitalist media. As Harvey notes, one of the most prominent DIY publishing collectives, Crimthin©, envisions an alternative to neoliberalism by seeking to “purge themselves of all traces of incorporation into the capitalist market logic (2005, 186). Many scholars have observed that the logic of zine publication embraces difference (Chu 1997; Duncombe 1997; Piano 2007; Spencer 2008). For example, Duncombe writes,

By expressing the experiences and thoughts of individuals, perzines are illustrations of difference. Not the difference offered in abundance through mass culture—difference of style, of soundbite, of lifestyle—but a distinction far more profound... real difference is not to be found on the fifty-plus channels on cable TV, but through searching for its expression in out-of-the-way places and through creating that expression oneself (1997, 24).

Zine-makers use zines to encourage idiosyncratic expressions and aesthetics and, as we will see, cultivate a type of knowledge that is meant to be local in the sense I defined above using Scott and Trouillot. The crux of this research, however is to explain the social meaning of cultivating such knowledge in the specific ways during construction and distribution, which I believe is to represent and teach an authentic relationship to the city.

## Zines and Urbanity

### *Spatial Discourse and Zines*

The spatial implications of zine publication are often put in two broad types of spatial configuration. According to the literature on zines, they constitute new discursive spaces and new material. In the article, “Navigating the Media Environment: How Youth Claim a Place Through Zines,” Julie Chu concludes that zines are places for youthful protest in the media environment. According to Chu, the rules for mediating reality in zines provide more opportunity for expression than the rest of the media environment, as if zines are a free space within what Appadurai refers to as a mediascape—“the distribution of the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information...and to the images of the world created by these media” (Appadurai 1990, 517-518 quoted in Marcus, George E. and Michael M.J. Fischer 2006). A mediascape is therefore not only the representations but also the constitution of the production and distribution of media. Zines are place for expression in terms of what they represent and the way they represent what they represent.

In addition to also describing zines as a space themselves, Piano (2007) explores other spatial implications of zines in the Riot Grrrl movement as “manipulating punk spaces that were both textual and material” (312). The observation is both discursive as well as material in the types of events and bookstores that would function within the DIY scene. According to Piano, “Riot Grrrls’ insistence on gender-specific spaces had connections not only to second-wave feminists’ ‘consciousness-raising’ groups but to radical lesbian communities in college towns and cities across the United States in the 1970s and 1980s, many of whom created an infrastructure of alternative spaces that

included women-only bookstores, drop-in centers, exhibitions, and performances” (2007, 312).

Michel de Certeau offers a useful theoretical framework to examine the discourse of zine-makers with regard to urban space and resistance. Michel de Certeau describes two discursive forms that the construction of urban space linguistically takes. One is by seeing and the other by doing or acting (1984, 119). Drawing from sociolinguists, Charlotte Linde and William Labov, de Certeau describes geographic maps as articulations of seeing, while tour narratives are that of acting (Charlotte Linde and William Labov 1975, 924-939 quoted in de Certeau 1984, 119). According to de Certeau, maps have emerged as the dominant discourse of spatial constructions as states, science, and agencies utilize map type spatial discourse in order to render legible geography and data, while tours have become less powerful (121). This research draws on this understanding of spatial discourse to understand the context of how zine-makers represent urban space.

In this research I use the term “space” in the same sense that Michel de Certeau defines in *The Practice of Everyday Life*. According to de Certeau, “*Space is a practiced place*. The street geometrically defined by urban planners is transformed into a space by walkers. In the same way, an act of reading is the space produced by the practice of a particular place: a written text, i.e., a place constituted by a system of signs” (1984, 117). This distinction between the terms ‘place’ and ‘space’ is useful, because it echoes the way that people involved in DIY use the term space in ‘show space’ and ‘practice space’—any place, whether storage unit, warehouse, garage, or other room used by DIY punks to create the space for cultural production. Spaces, in this sense are inherently ephemeral.



In his article/e-zine, *The Temporary Autonomous Zone*, Hakim Bey characterizes temporary enclaves of autonomy that exist in order to support a broader network of resistance to whatever the mainstream culture of the day. Bey draws from historical accounts of nineteenth century pirates on the Barbary Coast who maintained a global network by scattering temporary small island hideaways throughout the seas where ships could trade booty for supplies and gather information. Bey acknowledges that the autonomous islands of one group of pirates may be different in another time or location. He proposes events such as dinner parties and underground celebrations could be the contemporary form of Temporary Autonomous Zones. As Duncombe points out “the power of modern corporate culture state can soak up anything it encounters, transforming discontents into affirmations. The solution then is to disappear. This is the strategy of the TAZ or Temporary Autonomous Zone” (1997, 170).

For Duncombe, the ephemeral aspects of zine publication are strategies to avoid co-optation. The same is true for Spencer who observes, “Zines come and go, they can appear for just one issue and then disappear. They are a temporal form of media, not aimed at filling a commercially viable niche in the market” (2008, 20).

This research examines the methods of circulating zines through, mail, internet distros, or at shows—during which a house, bar, or café (the place) is transformed into a space for cultural production—for their ephemeral quality, however this is an effect of something much deeper within the culture of zine publication.

The scope of narrow distribution—opposed to dissemination—has certain characteristics, like the quality of being ephemeral, that I do not understand as ends for a specific purpose, but rather spatial forms of social meanings. Zines are narrowcast because

zine-makers value individual interaction and oppose the homogenization and simplification of mass media. They disappear and in doing so cultivate a local and flexible type of knowledge that is ever evolving. In my analysis, the ephemeral and narrowcast aspects of distributing zines are crucial to their value as articulations of authenticity and resistance because of the function of zines as instructive tools for DIY punks.

## End Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Aulik, Denise. "Zines, Literacy, and the Adolescent." *American Libraries Association*. (Sept/Oct 2006) under "zines literacy" [www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/kqweb/karchives/volume35/351aulik](http://www.ala.org/ala/aasl/aaslpubsandjournals/kqweb/karchives/volume35/351aulik) (accessed 2/16/09)

<sup>ii</sup> Gee capitalizes the term 'Discourse' when referring to social roles.

<sup>iii</sup> Knobel, Michele, and Colin Lankshear. "Cut, Paste, Publish: The Production and Consumption of Zines" *New Literacies and Digital Technologies: A Focus on Adolescent Learners*. (2001) under "zines literacies," [www.geocities.com/c.lankshear/zines.html](http://www.geocities.com/c.lankshear/zines.html) (accessed 1/29/09).

<sup>iv</sup> Senator John McCain, *Crossfire*, CNN, October 15, 2004 quoted in *People's Movements, People's Press* by Bob Ostertag (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), xxiv.

## Chapter 3: Analysis

### Beyond Books: Zines and Literacies

#### *The Content of Zines*

While considering the social practices involved in making and distributing zines, there are some fundamental issues of defining zines that need to be addressed. This is something that academia has had a problem with in the past as so much research does not seem to know what to do with zines. Are they, as Aulik (2006) suggests, books that can be used to get adolescents interested in the classroom? Although most often in the form of pamphlets, zines ought not be confused with books for a variety of reasons. There are many aspects of making zines that differ from writing books and zine-makers understand this upon initially deciding to make a zine. These include editorial considerations, textual structure, the actual construction of zines, and distribution techniques.

Zine-makers often use typewriters to type the text of zines, making the mistakes and corrections legible on the published page. People who make zines embrace a rough and abrasive aesthetic where spelling and clarity are arbitrary. As one zine-maker told me while he was perusing a distro that I was watching during a show, “you can write about anything you want and that is the best thing. Even if you write a zine and it has a thousand spelling mistakes, it still feels good to make something.” The focus in writing, illustrating, and collating a zine is more about making the thing and how it feels to create than about grammar or other aesthetic standards. The aesthetics of zines is more tactile. For many zine-makers the process of making and distributing the zine is more important than what it is or how it looks. This is why a rough and punk aesthetic appeals to many zine-makers.

There are; however, zine-makers who prefer make very refined zines that have perfect grammar and a symmetrical or polished aesthetics.

Even when zine-makers use more elaborate methods of printing—such as block printing, mimeograph, or screen-printing—spelling and grammar is often an afterthought. This is very different from writing a book where spelling and editorial considerations are very important and incorporated into the process of publication through the editor. Zine-makers; however, embrace the freedom of not having an editor, publisher, or authority figure dictating their publications' form or content. They value the freedom of expressing themselves with complete control over their creations. Zine-makers personalize the voice in the text without catering to the formalities of conventional education. A sample sentence from a story about a night in New Orleans on a trip in *Bike Hobo Stories* illustrates this lack of concern for formal spelling and grammatical rules:

The baptists wore funny blasers and dropped me inside the cracked purple dawn of the city of new orleans. I sat in the graveyard on elysia n fields for a while, because the light suggested it, i neededto get my grip into t e citybefore finding my friend emma and all else that would occur from there.

Although zine-makers often write extensively in their zines, classroom writing literacy simply does not matter to many of them. Not only are formal standards of writing often abandoned by zine-makers in the essay-style text within zines, but other textual structures such as fragmented text, lists, and images with captions are frequently preferred over essay style text.

For example, in *Bike Hobo Stories* the words “where, where, where, where, where” are printed next to a picture of a cow skull. Issue five of volume five of *The Nose Knows*,

Happy, the zine-maker, uses diagrams of her clothes and body with short phrase descriptions like “I shall weave these pieces of this lighter into my mohawk” and “tucked in to my navy blue trousers” to express how different she looks since getting a job as an medical technician. Zine-makers often use lists and phrases embedded in images to communicate their ideas. The layouts of text and images in zines are frequently chaotic, collaged, or facing multiple directions.

*No Gods, No Mattress* is a personal zine that combines writing, drawings, and hijacked images to reinforce its themes. Images permeate the zine that look as though they have been cut out of books, magazines, or illustrations and used in the new context of the zine. Zine-makers hijack text and images for irony, humor, or simply for aesthetic purposes. For example *No Gods, No Mattresses* contains fragmented images cut from what appears to be children’s books, anatomy textbooks, and nature magazines. Zine-makers use whatever resources they can find to make zines for free. Stolen images and text; Office supplies; printing technologies such as printers, scanners, and copiers; or the time spent at a meaningless job become useful resources that are re-appropriated for the purposes of zine publication. According to zine-makers, making zines is about using what one has to produce something that is one’s own authentic creation. This is the aspect of zine construction that Knobel and Lankshear draw from de Certeau to refer to as bricolage.

Creating zines is about both consuming and producing. It is both taking in from a society in which the zine-maker does not have control, and then rendering that information to express or put out the zine-maker’s authentic experience. Bauman (2000) places the ethos of bricolage within a pattern of individuality that causes people in industrialized urban society to be less engaged with power, however in the DIY culture of zine publication

bricolage is a tactic for social engagement. This type of social engagement; however, is ephemeral. Before explaining how zine-makers attempt to engage with power in this ephemeral way, it is necessary to describe the mechanics of distributing zines.

### *Distributing Zines*

At many shows zine-makers or people with distros set their material up on a table or available surface and distribute what they can. This is called *tabling*. While on tour, bands will bring zines or distros that they or their friends have made with them to table at their shows. As one tables, he or she answers questions and negotiates the terms of transferring the material—whether for sale, trade, or as a gift.

The price of zines is typically free or for trade when in a city where the person distributing it lives but if on tour, the person tabling usually wants money for gas and food. If someone offers the band or people operating a distro a place to stay while on tour he or she will usually get zines or other material from the distro in return. Zine-makers also bring their zines to infoshops like the Iron Rail and sell them for whatever the price that the volunteer deems reasonable. The zines are then sold for a dollar more so that the Iron Rail makes money. Zine-makers often give zines for free to the Iron Rail in which case the volunteer working will set the price for one or two dollars. The people who make them consider zines nonprofit and they are often sold to make up for their costs.

Zine-makers also distribute their zines on the internet through online distros or by contacting a zine-maker through e-mail. Many zine-makers prefer tabling for the opportunity to have face-to-face contact with the people consuming their zines. Through distributing and consuming zines, zine-makers feel like they are building relationships with people. For many zine-makers, the interaction with people in distributing zines is an

important element of publication. This manifests in the zines themselves as letters printed to the zine-maker from people who have read or looked at previous issues of the zine. The letters in zines are often criticisms or praise for certain aspects of the zine, or they explain how someone has used the zine. The goal, for zine-makers, is reciprocal interaction between producers and consumers and for the two roles to be interchangeable or indistinguishable among participants within DIY punk. As I will expand upon in the next section, this interaction among strangers helps develop a specific type of knowledge that zine-publication constitutes.

According to many zine-makers, anyone can publish a zine if they devote time to making it. "Anyone can make a zine and that's the greatest part of it...just fold a piece of paper and write on it," explained Tom, a zine-maker living in the French Quarter. This sentiment, whether its true or not, along with the blurring of consumer and producer roles in zine-making illustrates a desire for meaningful social interaction. It is to encourage participation in production rather than just the consumption of zines. Many zine-makers will encourage people to reproduce or alter the zine itself. On the back of *D.I.Y. Wine*, for example, there is a fragment that says, "Copy and distribute it to friends, and if you wish, correct errors and add recipes... but keep it free." Zines are collaborative in that zine-makers encourage zine consumers to make their own copies and change any aspects that he or she would like.

This collaboration among strangers takes on a political dimension for zine-makers, as they try to destroy any distinction between producer or artist and consumer or audience. In the ska fanzine, *Pick It Up!* Maddie Ruthless begins with an editorial note, "Whatever you do... abolish all hierarchy that lurks in the shadows of ska. Stop the bro-

mance. Fuck Boundaries between performer and observer.” The people who use zines extend this value into other aspects of zine publishing infrastructure as well. For example, many flyers for shows and events will also have something printed on them that encourage involvement or production in some capacity—for example, “noladiy.org...get involved or get out” is printed on one show flyer that was posted at the Iron Rail. Other flyers contain more polite request for help cooking food, handing out flyers, or cleaning up afterwards. The meaning of this collaborative effort is, according to zine-makers, an act of resistance to a pattern of hierarchical class structures in our society. The attempt at rendering indistinguishable producers and consumers in DIY punk has another significance that will become evident in the next section of this analysis during a discussion on using zines to teach.

### *Zines and Literacy*

Based on this analysis, I depart from the Aulik’s claim that zines constitute a sustained interest in the book, and that is why they should be used in developing classroom literacy. Not only do zines have a very different purpose and function than books—which I will discuss further in the next section—but zine-makers’ priorities while making zines are much different from those developed for use in the classroom. Also, many zines completely disregard skills—such as spelling, grammar, and essay-style text—that are valued in the classroom. To introduce zines into formal education settings would not only bring zines into a new setting, but also to transform the goals, values, and tools of that setting—the classroom, which is arguably long overdue. This transformation has, as evident in the shifting fundamentals of literacy theory discussed in the last chapter, already begun. I



believe it is the very differences from books and traditional classroom literacy that make zines more relevant to formal curricula in the classroom.

DIY publishing encourages aesthetic and content diversity, individual authenticity, and innovation to where even the form of zines as a pamphlet or book is not the primary concern of those who use them—especially given the rise of web zines on the internet and zine formats such as folded paper or in envelopes. The ways that zines function is often just as important to the people who make them as zines' worth as a tactile object. Thus zines must be explained according to both what they *are* and what they *do* for zine-makers.

Where zines can be useful to literacy, however, is in their articulation of alternative socialization to the patterns of classroom and mainstream culture. Research like Piano's and Voß's examine this function of socializing individuals into identities, groups, and what Gee refers to as "Discourses". Knobel and Lankshear examine the linguistic mechanics of this process. The implications of zines to literacy is very powerful for people who understand themselves in terms that they feel are misrepresented or marginalized from mainstream discourses—such as women, gender queer people, and minorities. Research on zines, bricolage, and situated literacies so often focuses on identity politics; however, I remain unconvinced that this exhausts the meanings involved in zine culture. This research observed didactic or instructive functions of zines that seemed more to be about socializing individuals into a specific relation to knowledge and the city than for socialization into a certain identity.

## Zines and Flexible Knowledge

### *Zines as Tools for Teaching and Learning*

Many zines serve an overtly pedagogical function for those who use them. The content of zines as well as the distribution process helps to develop a certain changing and practical knowledge that those who make and consume zines value. Cultivating this knowledge is a major function of zines. In this section I will look at how zine-makers use zines to cultivate a knowledge that is embedded in personal experience. Zine-makers intend for those who consume their zines to use this knowledge in adapting their lives and incorporating DIY ethics into their everyday practices. There are signs—both in zines and in the ways that they are distributed— that teach this epistemological discourse or relationship to knowledge within zine culture. I believe that, in this teaching capacity of zines, is where zine-making and zine distribution as resistance becomes most salient.

In the zine anthology, *Making Stuff and Doing Things*, New Orleans artist, Kyle Bravo compiled and published two zines that were entirely made of various how-to zines that he had acquired over years of collecting them. In these zines one can find instructions on how to do many types of activities such as gardening, cooking, printing, crafting, making clothes, surviving outside, repairing toilets and other household items, making beer and wine, and lots more.

How-to zines are typically personalized with notes on the author's experiences— inspirations, goals, and mistakes—involved in whatever instruction is being communicated. For example, after explaining how to make and maintain a compost system in his zine, *I Hate This Part of Texas #2*, New Orleans zine maker John writes, "My friend Sarah and I built a really simple compost bin that works great at my house, using pallets and some chicken wire. I wanted it to have doors and a hinged top, but it's just fine without that stuff" (Bravo 2005, 94). Zine-makers personalize the facts and instruction in how-to

zines. The information is the result of the research and the experimentation of the people who make the zines.

Another popular New Orleans zine with an explicitly pedagogical agenda that incorporates personal reflection is *Chainbreaker*—a bike repair zine written by Shelley Jackson. While the zine has lots of practical knowledge on bike maintenance, Shelley uses bikes to grapple other topics like gender and social class. In a *Chainbreaker* piece entitled “Bicycles and Women’s Fashion” Shelley recalls a story of when a friend told her that due to the way she dressed, according to a book on sexuality, Shelly would be considered transgender:

It was interesting to hear that way. I had just been doing all this reading about women’s clothing changes due to the bicycle, just writing about my own issues with being taken seriously as a woman doing work like I do, mechanics, construction, and even as a teenager selling tools. It dawned on me that for me, getting the respect I feel I deserve from men often means ridding myself of my sexuality and sex appeal all together.

The zine combines practical instruction with social analysis. According to Shelley, zines are “a great way that communities of people share information and stories; widen each other’s knowledge and understanding about new things (Jackson and Clark 2008, 131).

In *Chainbreaker*, the social observations supplement the technical parts about bike repair to serve the same function of “widening” peoples’ “knowledge and understanding.” How-to zines are often about sharing and constructing the knowledge of the zine maker’s experience along with the knowledge he or she accumulates from research. How-to zines are not the only zines that zine-makers use to construct or share knowledge.

Osa's zine, *Shotgun Seamstress*, is a fan zine focused on queer black punk art and music. When Osa makes issues of *Shotgun Seamstress* she is sharing histories and stories about black queer punks and artists by black queer punks and artists. For Osa, exposing black and queer artists is her way of recreating her "experience of being black and queer and a feminist in a largely white, mostly straight punk scene. Instead of writing about it like it is the worst thing that has ever happened to me, I'm writing like it's the best thing."<sup>i</sup> When Osa makes *Shotgun Seamstress* her goals are reaching younger kids and exposing artists. The fan zine is not just an expression of appreciation, but also the construction of a field of knowledge—or implied worldview—representing her experiences of what it is to be a black and queer punk and artist. It can exist for others because it exists for Osa, and it exists for Osa because she creates it through her compilations of expressions of fandom.

Osa refers to the exclusivity of the punk scene in the issue of *Shotgun Seamstress* about money when she writes, "I've always wondered why more Black folks weren't attracted to punk rock...It takes a little bit of the necessity away from money. Punk rock ideally encourages communal living, curbing your consumerism and DIY ethics." Osa uses *Shotgun Seamstress* to expose a non-linear and non-geographically specific history of black queer punks making art. Osa's intention is that younger black or queer people will read her zine and see that punk could be relevant to their lives and conversely that punk would benefit from their participation. Osa believes that exposing this knowledge to younger people will impact them and make their participation in DIY punk more positive. It is less about community for Osa than it is altering the individual's experience by recreating her own.

Many fanzines incorporate aspects from other types of zines to broaden the scope of their instructive function. For example, in the Community Records fanzine, which prints information on ska and punk bands that the label works with, there are also vegan recipes that have little to do with ska music, but support DIY cooking. Also, in issue eleven of *Pick It Up!* Maddie speckles the exposé of ska culture in her zine with other pieces, such as an essay on what to do when being stopped by the police called “Know Your Rights and Resist the Police State” and one on how to make dandelion wine. The content of zines and performance of zine-making is often about being or becoming more self-sufficient.

The DIY values driving zine publication try to minimize one’s reliance on government or corporate entities. Individuals who value finding ways of doing everyday tasks or creating histories without the legitimization of textbooks, government, or mass media use zines to publish this knowledge. For example, John began the piece on how to compost,

Lately I’ve been obsessed with two things—compost and homebrewing. There are a lot of similarities between the two. Both involve getting a few basic things together, things that can be scavenged or scrapped for; both involve getting a good recipe and having patience; both entail reusing stuff that other people might consider garbage, like empty bottles or kitchen scraps. And both are all about self-sufficiency and autonomy. Having more control in the cycle of what goes on all around you; what you produce, what you consume, what happens to your waste (Bravo 2005, 93).

The instruction in zines gives technical suggestions on how to accomplish whatever task while promoting scavenging for resources and doing as much as possible by using what one

has available, thus constituting a certain flexibility implicitly encouraged in the instruction.

*D.I.Y. Wine* begins with a passage on why people may want to make their own wine:

Some of us are just curious about how the products we consume are made and have an urge to do it ourselves and find out. Others like that homemade wine can be made dirt cheap—one gallon for less than \$5, or even less than that if you have access to a fruit tree, bee hive, fruit juice factory dumpster, or special chain store punk rock discount. You may be lured to the prospect of throwing the best parties after the collapse of industrial society, or more likely, of being the most popular person in your wing of the prison. Personally, I find it fun, and like the fact that I can make different varieties of wine not sold in the supermarket.

This zine's introduction incorporates the experience of the zine-maker; encouragement to scavenge and use what you have available; and a suggestion that neither society's collapse nor incarceration can keep someone from using the information in the zine. Whether this is true or not is beside the point, because the zine is about not relying on the state or economic system of society and rather learning to do and make as much as possible for one's self.

The limitations of this ideal are evident. Foucault points out there are normalizing affects in every enunciation, no matter how small or large (1977, 308) and as zine publication typically occurs in urban areas, zine-makers continue to participate in and consume from mainstream media economies throughout their daily lives. Zine-makers do not use their zines to disrupt corporate and state power, but rather as an ephemeral alternative. I will interpret this further in the next section on zines and urban space, but

there are varying degrees of how self-sufficient DIY punks and zine-makers are. Usually they are far less self-sufficient than they hope to be.

Zine-makers not only intend to share and construct knowledge in their zines, but also use that knowledge in their daily lives. As I observed in the first section in this chapter, making and distributing the zines is often just as if not more important than what the zines looks like. That insight along with the practical knowledge shared in zines indicates that zine-makers see an immediate need to this experiential information. Kyle Bravo explained,

I was interested in how a lot of zines would have instructions on how to do this or that—gardening, fixing a bike, or something—and I just stated collecting those really for my own interest. And I thought that there should really be a compilation of this. Regular people explaining to other regular people how to do things from their own experience.<sup>ii</sup>

The knowledge that zines generate is not based on expertise. It is based on experiences. This combined with the encouragement of plagiarism as well as their distribution practices—namely, valuing individual interaction rather than mass dissemination—gives zines and the information in them a flexibility to change according to the experiences of those who alter them. Zine-makers use zines as a medium through which they explicitly try to cultivate a type of knowledge that Scott refers to as *metis*—vernacular and practical information based on experience (1998, 310-311). Zine-makers develop and share flexible and experiential knowledge in their zines to cultivate practices, histories, and lifestyles that are unsanctioned and unmediated by the monolithic power of corporate or state institutions and representations to create an alternative to mainstream lifestyles which DIY

punks view reinforce oppressive social systems. I will discuss this DIY alternative further in the next section.

### *The Political Implications of the Edifying Functions of Zines*

Zine-makers define zines as being political in two ways. One is performative in the sense that they are not manifestations of corporate media and the other is in their content. In the first sense, a zine with no reference to politics in its content, like a silly comic strip, is still viewed by those who use them as having political significance. According to Osa, zines “are independent, and not part of the corporate machine that pumps out information. They aren’t like Time Warner. They are the opposite of that. In that way they are definitely political...and then depending on the content it’s political too.”<sup>iii</sup> People who make zines consider the fact that information and art can be shared without someone making a profit to be political and even radical.

Zine-makers explicitly value interaction and production. More important than expressing a poignant political critique, according to DIY punks, one ought to act politically by making their writing or art free or releasing their music themselves rather than with corporate help. In the case of DIY publication the medium is explicitly also the message. In one interview, the zine-maker explained, “You can do it yourself. It is political. If I make a zine about my adventures, it’s political because I don’t go to Barnes and Noble. I give it to independent places to carry. The fact that independent bookstores carry it is political.”<sup>iv</sup>

The other way in which zine-makers consider their zines political is in the zines’ content. Topics such as race, class, gender, economics, and the government are approached through personal stories. Much of Hope and Johns’ spliced issue of *I Hate This Part of Texas/Keep Loving, Keeping Fighting #7* is about their lives at various junctures in the year



following Hurricane Katrina—a strong hurricane that passed New Orleans on August 29, 2005 and served as a catalyst for the failure of a long-deteriorating levee system, flooding over eighty percent of the city. The zine discusses topics such as the inadequate government response, evacuation, collective trauma, crime, the influx of young white people to the city, and slumlords raising rents after the storm. For example, Hope discusses the slow response to Hurricane Katrina and the influx of people who came after the flood to enjoy the apocalypse with a story about reading another zine:

I read a zine the other day, a section of which chronicled this young writers time spent in New Orleans after the flood, how overwhelmed she became and had to leave. At some point she mentions that there is a house still sitting on top of a car in the lower ninth ward, FOUR MONTHS LATER, she writes in outraged bold capital letters. Four months later. I thought to write and thank her for being honest and for leaving, and to let her know that more than a year later, that house still sits on top of that car.

Here we can easily understand what Duncombe (1997) observes in zines as far as the political being personalized. Where this insight is most visible is in the function of zines as tools for teaching and zine-makers' rejection of capitalist goals related to media—such as the mass dissemination of information for the purpose of collective consumption. This research identified this as the specific act of resistance to capitalism and the state.

Zine-makers think of their zines as political in that they are not corporate productions and that they promote a different relationship between producer and consumer than capitalism enforces. My research uncovered; however, a much deeper and less commented on way that zine-makers use zines to personalize a broader sense of

politics—the vast spectrum of social arrangements, assumptions, and power relationships surrounding the zine-maker. To me, zines are political for embodying two literacies. The first, which I have just discussed, is the teaching function of zines. I understand this personalized and political approach to constructing and sharing knowledge as a situated literacy involving the practices of producing, distributing, and consuming zines. The other literacy, which I will analyze in the next section, is less about socializing an identity as in Piano's work or way to behave like in Voß's analysis. It is about socializing an explicitly intimate politicized relationship to the city, urban space, and communities that inhabit the city from the perspective of the zine-maker.

## Zines and the City

### *Zines and the DIY Punk City*

Zines are used in many ways to socialize people into a certain relationship to the city in two broad ways. The first way is heuristic—promoting the events and loci of DIY punk culture in the city that one lives. The second way that zine-makers use zines to establish a certain relationship to the city is by representing the broader aspects of the city—such as urban form and flows of capital and population—within the personal discourse of their zines. The heuristic urban narratives found in zines are useful for continuity to those who participate in DIY punk culture because of the reliance on ephemeral spaces and the fleeting nature of DIY punk institutions which is in part the spatial form resulting from a clear objective of resisting the mainstream. The representations of broader communities and urban space are also about personal experience and resistance and an effort to re-mediate through personal experience what zine-makers feel is often misrepresented in mass media.

Zine-makers often use their zines to promote DIY punk spaces—such as infoshops, punk houses, shows, cafés, warehouses, and events—located both in the city where they live and in other cities that they have traveled to. Zine-makers intend for those who read their zines to use these listings and descriptions in finding the spatial and temporal nodes of DIY within the local punk scene as well as get an impression of what the scene is like through the stories, images, and concert reviews that the zine-maker publishes.

DIY culture within punk constitutes a decentralized and fluid network of alternative punk culture. This means that when one sees a punk aesthetic at a shop or on a flyer, it may not be part of the DIY punk culture. There is a mainstream punk culture and an underground one that shares rhetoric of anarchy and creativity, but differ in their meanings and applications. The former is easy to see in stores; through mass media; and in larger music venues, while the latter is more evasive. DIY punk culture and zine infrastructure relies on ephemeral manifestations and meetings of cultural producers, thus the spaces that serve as loci for DIY punk activity do not continuously contribute to this alternative culture.

Often these spaces are set up on the margins of the city in abandoned buildings or the overgrown inner city swamps in the since Hurricane Katrina neglected City Park. This is what Jacqueline Groth and Eric Corijin refer to as “indeterminate spaces” (2005, 506). According to Groth and Corijin, places such as abandoned warehouses and urban parks “are not coded by market-led urban development—since temporarily left aside from the hegemonic visions of configuration of urban space (due to their having become obsolete in terms of their original function and use-value)—where distinct possibilities for practices of innovation and playful intervention arise” (506). Show spaces with distros are assembled

for a smaller length of time here than punk houses and squats so it is easy to compare this to Bey's metaphor of the dinner party as a temporary autonomous zone. The events last a couple of hours to avoid being shut down by police and property owners/management. DIY publication relies on these unplanned "indeterminate spaces" for cultural production and the events at these spaces relies on information in flyers, word of mouth, and zines to mobilize people.

Frequently zine-makers and other DIY punks will organize events such as workshops or "skill shares" to teach people how to make zines and set up shows. At these workshops, people share their experiences using technology such as amps and dealing with the constraints of setting up a show space in various types of places. Those who organize these workshops formally instruct and socialize others to the DIY punk relationship to urban space. More frequently within the past year in New Orleans, women and people of color—such as Osa and the Iron Rail's ladies' night—are hosting these kinds of workshops for other women and people of color so while identity is still a relevant terrain for social activism within the scene the broader common denominator to New Orleans DIY punk is—as this research suggests—cultivation of flexible local knowledge and a specific relationship to urban space that values individual experience.

Zines are a way for people to find out what is happening and where it is happening in the city. In *Pick It Up!* Maddie publishes flyers for the Iron Rail, places to listen to ska, and information about radio shows that play ska. As Maddie documents where one can find DIY ska and punk in New Orleans, she constructs a frame both in the zine and in public imagination of the for understanding spatially the city's DIY ska/punk culture. It is a map of where to find DIY punk culture, but a map that is constructed out of subjective experience

and personal narratives. While DIY punk is evasive to avoid co-optation by the mainstream and to maximize social interaction, these subjective and adaptive maps allow access to DIY punk culture.

Zine-makers also write about the drama and history of local scenes and people with whom the zine-maker is acquainted. In an interview published in the recently circulated second issue of *No Gods, No Mattress*, Nathan—who makes the zine, *Breakfast*—describes various DIY punk institutions such as the Iron Rail, Plan B Bike Co-Op, and Nowe Miasto—a New Orleans punk house and Books 2 Prisoners office space. In the interview Nathan also describes his experiences living in a punk house, outlining some of the problems he had with the living situation and the impact on a community who lived in the neighborhood. The interview shares information about the network of punk projects in New Orleans while explaining Nathan's experiences with these projects. Zine-makers will often interview other zine-makers, punks, and artists not to simply appreciate the celebrity of their achievements, but to explore the politics and experiences surrounding those achievements or (as in this case) the politics and experiences surrounding local punk institutions to start or continue discussions about the ethics and ideals involved in those projects. Zines are a media through which the punk city is given meaning by those who participate in it.

Many people use the stories in zines to explain what DIY punk activities and projects are in their cities, who is involved, and where they are located. New Orleans show promoter, Iron Rail volunteer, and punk rock legend, Bryan Funck explained, "There is a handful [of personal zines] that I like, but those are by local people talking about local things."<sup>v</sup> National zines like *Maximum Rock'n'Roll* also do scene reports where people can submit entries for them to print that explain issues that people involved in DIY punk

culture in their city are dealing with. This is to show people that share DIY values what individuals in other cities are doing to support the local network of DIY punk. These stories—while dealing with local issues—provide continuity across cities to DIY punk.

Zine-makers circulate their experience-based knowledge on a small scale through distros and infoshops, which they consider free spaces to develop ideas and practical alternatives to mainstream values, capitalism, patriarchy, and the state. The fact that there is no profit motivating zine-makers to distribute zines permits a way to act in opposition to the way corporate information is disseminated by reinforcing the flexibility of the knowledge published in zines through individual interaction and sharing rather than attempting to get the information out to as many people as possible. People employ tactics such as setting up distros and re-appropriating space during zine distribution to alter the ways that bookstores, cafés, bars, and houses function from loci for capital or property accumulation to loci of social engagement. The infrastructure that facilitates zine publication compliments the content and flexible didactic function of zines as an articulation of media resistance.

Through distros at these ephemeral places where zine-makers and movers use their surroundings to create space to share, trade, and sell their zines promoting ethics and politics based on DIY principles in order to share, as opposed to spread, useful information and interpretations about the city. It is in both the content of their zines and re-defining places as spaces for the exchange of ideas that zine-makers practice bricolage, collaborate with strangers, and in doing so create a temporary engagement with power, that power being the way that media is expected to function in a world where media is dominated by few and disseminated to the masses.

Mass media is a heavy fast flow that disseminates simplified information such as single events throughout geographic space by hi-tech communication systems in order to create an authoritative and sustainable worldview. Against this heavy high-tech current; however, zine knowledge is a slower, lighter flow of nuanced information constructing temporary representations of the DIY punk city and its evolution through anecdotes and histories. These representations of the DIY punk city are personalized and fleeting in content, but as a genre of information it continuously works the same way—by emerging on, for example, a table under the dim light of generator-powered Christmas lights illuminating the collapsed half of a warehouse between Tchoupitoulas Street and the Mississippi River where a show is taking place. The light and ephemeral flow of information fits the highly vulnerable aspects of show spaces and loci for cultural production, which are often threatened by cops because of noise, trespassing, and/or squatting—inhabiting space without anyone’s permission.

#### *Scenic Zines and Zine Tours of New Orleans*

The spatial flows constituted by media production and distribution is one aspect of Appadurai’s notion of mediascape, but the other aspect is the “images of the world” found within that media (Appadurai 1990, 517-518 quoted in Marcus, George E. and Michael M.J. Fischer 2006). Whether stories about gentrification; ethnographies; histories of neighborhoods; fears of the city becoming a Disney simulation of New Orleans; or descriptions of bike rides, the city itself is a character in the zines that emerge from New Orleans. New Orleans zine-makers focus on manifestations of economic injustice or racial segregation in their everyday lives. This personal/political ideology is feminist insight that

was brought into the zine-making culture by feminist pamphlets of the 1970s and even more so by the Riot Grrrl movement in the late 1980s and early 1990s.

In the first issue of *Breakfast*, Nathan writes an essay style attempting to break the assumption that a place can be simply dangerous or safe without reference to the history and social causes for neighborhood characteristics. Nathan introduces the theme with a story about getting assaulted in a “nice” neighborhood near his childhood home in Michigan. He goes on to describe his positive experiences doing bike delivery in some neighborhoods in New Orleans where people have told him to be afraid. For some people constructions of the city resist other ways that New Orleans is constituted. The New Orleans that one finds in *Breakfast*, for example, is not the “murder capital” that you hear about in mainstream media (Hylton 2006; McCarthy 2009; Vargas 2009), but rather a more nuanced place where structural disenfranchisement of black people and the creation of racialized neighborhoods have spatial implications as well as social. In the seventh issue of *I Hate This Part of Texas*, John deals with the murder of a friend and observes,

Some people demand more cops, believe in arming themselves for safety. There is an obvious root to the problem, if no simple solution. There is a lack of resources in this city, of social services and funding for schools. There are few jobs that pay well, even if you went to school, and not a lot of opportunity for anything better. There is an obvious disparity between rich and poor, leaving many people needing to look out for themselves however they must. People are desperate and disconnected and do not see a way out.

Zine-makers portray the city’s social dynamics in terms that are much different from the shock and sensation of mainstream news media discourse.



Zine-makers also try to discuss causal aspects of social problems and trauma through their zines in order to better understand the city. In an interview with Ethan Clark, he expanded on the city's presence in zines:

There are definitely Bay Area Zines that are love songs, histories, and ethnographies of the Bay, but a heavy theme in New Orleans zines is just trying to wrap your brain around this weird place we live in. Even in a zine like *Chainbreaker*, which is about bikes, there is a ton of that aspect to it. Mine definitely. *Nosedive* would have political histories of New Orleans, and so would *Publik Enema*. That would have huge articles about gentrification and radical histories of New Orleans.<sup>vi</sup>

The stories in zines are usually about the specific spaces that the zine-maker inhabits. New Orleans is a city with a lot of neighborhood pride, and so the zines that are published here often focus on neighborhoods. Neighborhoods are also an easier size to bracket in both material and representational terms within personal experience. Zine-makers feel as though they can better interpret the communities in their neighborhoods more intimately than they could describe the city as a whole.

They often describe the social and physical characteristics of the neighborhood focusing on how people interact; what activities the people in the neighborhood take part in; and what the zine-makers presence in the neighborhood means to their understanding of an already established community or history of the urban space. The neighborhoods that make more frequent appearances in zines are typically down river from the Central Business District. Often zine makers write about neighborhoods like the Seventh Ward and Bywater. Many punks live in these regions because they can find cheap rents or houses to squat.

The stories in their zines reflect their presence and its implications in the area. For example, in a zine called, *Dear\_\_\_\_, I wrote this zine for you*; Jamie wrote a section called “So you’re probably wondering what’s going on in New Orleans at 725 Lesseps in the Ninth Ward.” The section describes crime in the neighborhood, “What can we do?” Jamie asked, “The cops suck. I’ve seen black kids on my block thrown up against cars and searched, and I know that shit happens more often, more intensely when the cops get more calls. The rent is going up. It’s been a racially mixed neighborhood for a while, but more white people with money are moving in. (like me)” (Clark 2006, 70).

The stories about neighborhoods in New Orleans have continued since the floods after Hurricane Katrina. Some zine makers who lived in New Orleans prior to the storm print their memories and frustrations regarding changing conceptions of the city. In *I Hate this Part of Texas #7* John writes, “I always want to hear the old stories, the community histories, and I enjoy retelling them, passing them on.” Learning about punk institutions or why the ARK is called ‘the ARK’ is part of constructing the DIY punk city and, according to John, when people do not learn the various local histories, it is as if they are not living in the same city. “The New Orleans they are coming to know is vastly different, in many ways, from the New Orleans I knew” admits John in the zine.

While some of the New Orleans residents behind popular zines before the storm—like the people behind *Nosedive* and *Crude Noise*—have moved away, new people—like Osa and Nathan—have moved to the city and published their zines. According to the zine-makers I talked to, during the year after the floods of 2005 many New Orleans residents who published zines were too preoccupied with more fundamental decisions of where to live and what had happened to make zines. Many of them have begun publishing again.

Zine-makers sometimes use what de Certeau refers to as seeing or map legibility to describe the city. In *I Hate This Part of Texas*, John describes the neighborhood by observing, "A few blocks from my house, there are still many boarded up houses and small businesses. Corner stores that may not open again. Houses that may have been abandoned for years. There are also piles of gutted drywall and furniture and old clothes." This passage from the zine describes the neighborhood without explicating the subject's action, movement, or the experience. It is authoritative in its discourse of taking the subject out of the picture, like a map. The zine-maker offers a snapshot view of what his street looks like. The same is true for a piece about the Tremé by Skot! in *Publik Enema #14*, there are hand drawn maps of the Tremé neighborhood in New Orleans as well as hijacked images showing the evolution of the neighborhood through the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (Clark 2006, 72-79). This is also illustrated in *Breakfast*, in which Nathan characterizes Uptown New Orleans:

Though uptown is a broad term, its definition elusive, uptown is definitely a whole different creature. Here I guess I use the label to mean what geographer Richard Campanella calls 'the white tea kettle'. Its bulbous body contains the universities, Whole Foods, Audubon Park and its spout funneling power between Magazine and St. Charles, pouring down towards the CBD.

More prevalent in zines; however, is a subjective representation of the city. Often zine-makers will publish narratives that describe New Orleans or other cities by taking the reader through their experiences. The spatial organization of New Orleans is often described in narratives that include the zine-makers' actions. In *Bike Hobo Stories*, the zine-maker describes,

Days i'd be biking down esplanade, past all the places where commerce sliced it apart and left creaking sketchy ancient houses hanging and tilting back to the earth again. Nights me and emma walked around on the levee or would go to the quarter for no particular reason. I got out lots of library books and read them on various sidewalks and nooks and crannies of the city, or watched people and wrote.

Watched kids tap dancing with bottle caps attached to their shoes, and watched the people watching them.

The zine-maker describes a geography that is interpretive and experiential and is thus unique his or her own experience. The zine-maker merges the built environment, personal experience, and social observations into his or her representation of urban space.

Sometimes the tours are more specific in describing the built environment, but typically they always at least two of those three elements in the narrative. Such as the case with *Breakfast*, where Nathan takes the reader on a bike ride:

The beautiful abandoned factory, the liquor stores and hair salons and empty storefronts that once served BW Cooper soon give way to immense Spanish style villas in one direction, and plantation style mansions in the other. Down Napoleon, across Claiborne, past the hospital, under the live oaks, past the circle drives and balconies, a right on St. Charles.

This tour of the city not only shares the zine-maker's experience, but also describes built environments of New Orleans and ways that the zine-maker interprets that geography.

*Bike Hobo Stories* and *Shotgun Seamstress* both have stories about hitchhiking, train hopping, and touring around the United States. These stories describe places through the lens of experience. Zines frequently personalize places in the same way they personalize

politics, by explicitly and reflexively describing the empirical through the lens of subjective experience. As Senora describes in a *Shotgun Seamstress* article, “We started in Olympia, Washington and ended in Arcata, California. We were supposed to hitch all the way back to New Orleans via a rainbow gathering, but Kat got sick so we had to take a greyhound back.” Places are more often situated with reference to the actions and experiences of the storyteller rather than objectively placed on a map.

The same value of individual experience that drives the use of zines for teaching manifests in the way that zine-makers write about the city. Zine-makers use zines to rethink urbanity in ways that differ from those represented by mainstream media, corporate advertisements, or government representations. In New Orleans, zine-makers attempt to break down assumptions of ‘urban life’ and ‘place’ that permeate mainstream media’s urban discourse using personal stories. For example, zines often focus on causal social problems by discussing the constant poverty and desperation that the zine-maker observes rather than the shocking symptoms of physical violence that the mainstream media highlights and tying those symptoms to the place in which they occur.

Zines also contain information regarding DIY events, activities, resources, and spaces around the city—letting other people know about spaces for DIY punk culture to proliferate. Zine-makers use this information in zines, as well as narrowcast publishing techniques such as tabling distros and review zines, to promote the nodal and temporal locations of DIY punk culture in cities. This helps to mobilize the flows of people that may be unacquainted, new to the city, or unaware of the DIY punk social network to points of correspondence where they can respond and further develop DIY culture. The DIY punk

city constituted in zines thus “looks” much different than the city in tourist brochures or in maps.

The spatial knowledge in zines constitutes a discursive form that—in Linde and Labovs’ as well as de Certeau’s terms—combines legible/map-type representations with action/tour narratives. Zine-makers combine publishing hand drawn or hijacked maps and histories or descriptions of the place with their own individualized experiences. The pervasive use of tour-style discourse in zines is an expression that the dominant status that, according to de Certeau, tour-type spatial constructions do not enjoy (1984, 119-122) does not apply to zine-makers. Zine-makers use a tour-style of discourse to try to understand and represent the neighborhoods and cities they inhabit as well as the geopolitical processes they witness in their daily lives. I conclude from this that the politically personalized discourse that Duncombe observed manifests in the ways that zine-makers represent urban space in addition to politics.

## End Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Osa, interview by the author, February 10, 2010.

<sup>ii</sup> Kyle Bravo, interview by the author, February 15, 2010.

<sup>iii</sup> Osa, interview by the author, February 10, 2010.

<sup>iv</sup> Tom, interview by the author, February 11, 2010.

<sup>v</sup> Bryan Funck, interview by the author, March 17, 2009.

<sup>vi</sup> Ethan Clark, interview by the author, March 10, 2009.

## **Chapter 4: Conclusions**

### **Zines, Literacy, and Resistance**

In my analysis I examined the culture of DIY publishing within New Orleans zine publication. I described how zine-makers make and distribute zines to construct and share a type of local and flexible knowledge that one would not find in books because of both the content and the practices involved in distributing zines. Zine-makers and those who consume zines use zines to share and learn a type of knowledge based on the personal experience of the zine-maker and meant for practical everyday application. As evident in my analysis of both the discourse in zines and the practices involved in making and distributing them, zine-makers and those who set up distros use zines to socialize others into 1) a certain type of epistemological discourse that values practical knowledge and personal experience and 2) a relationship with the city based upon subjective experience.

Within DIY punk, zines are considered a radical media because they disintegrate the borders between producers and consumers. However, my research concludes that this is only a symptom of the truly radical aspects of this subculture: zine-making and zine distribution is an attempt at teaching flexible and useful knowledge and a personalized relationship to the city. This is radical because of how it differs in both content and forms from the way mainstream media is ubiquitously disseminated. Zine-making is resistance because it is an action based on zine-makers' articulated opposition against corporate media and its simplified representations and impacts of homogenization.

There are, however, real limitations to the resistance articulated by zine-makers and in some ways the mechanics of narrowcast publication, while helping to distinguish the type of knowledge mediated in zines from mainstream media, isolates people who are

already familiar with DIY ethics. Although places that serve many different types of people will host the ephemeral space created at a show, the people exposed to this information are still often already familiar with DIY punk culture and practices. Also the representations in zines are ephemeral because of their small circulation. This means the critiques and representations in zines are only public temporarily. Future research could explore the role and possible impacts of DIY media in acquiring sustained social power for oppressed groups in specific situations or in broader social transformations with special regard to social categories like gender, race, and sexuality.

### Text and Space

In my analysis I discussed the spatial flows of information constituted by zine distribution as well as how zine-makers employ a specific urban discourse while representing neighborhoods and the city in their zines. Zine-makers rely on ephemeral spaces to distribute and consume zines. This works well for articulating zines as resistance to the way mass media is transferred in society and testifies to the importance of unplanned urban space for subcultural development. I am convinced that more research on the spatial implications of zine-making and their relevance to urban studies would yield interesting results, especially regarding impacts of online distros, internet media, or invasive narrowcast texts to further explore the flows of DIY knowledge in various social and physical landscapes.

In this thesis I suggested that zine-makers use zines to socialize other DIY punks into a personal and political relationship with the city, and this is an act of resistance against mass mediated representations of New Orleans. In addition to zine-makers' accounts of the city being much different from and opposed to mainstream representations



of the violence and charms of New Orleans, the personalized discourse of place and subjective accounts of the city are acts of resistance against the rapid and uneven market-driven development of neighborhoods where people that typically live elsewhere profit and residents are forced out of the area.

In *Naked City: The Death and Life of Authentic Urban Places*, Sharon Zukin describes how the search for roots in the constantly changing bureaus of New York City indicate a “separation between our experience of space and our sense of self” (Zukin 2010, 220). There are disconnects between the shifting meanings of spatial forms and various communities’ understandings of the places where those forms exist. According to Zukin, developers and city governments are becoming keen to this—forced to offer nod to local aesthetics or culture by their constituencies while still remaining committed to urban redevelopment and growth (228). Zukin observes that mainstream print media and blogs play a significant role in the way that authenticity operates as a rhetorical tool in urban redevelopment.

By romanticizing neighborhoods or constructing new images of what a certain neighborhood is *really like* while ignoring the specific histories of those places, urban hipster magazines and blogs “have forged an increasingly important connection between capital, state, and the new urban middle class, between the interests of investors, officials, and consumers” (229). Zukin believes that rather than authentic places, developers and officials should focus on authentic communities and ways to preserve them by “creating new forms of public-private stewardship that give residents, workers, and small business owners, as well as buildings and districts, a right to put down roots and remain in place” (246).

Zine-makers represent the social dynamics and physical forms of New Orleans through the lens of their own experience in an effort to establish an authentic relationship to the city. In doing so they reject the ethos and processes driving urban redevelopment as these are often place-based rather than people-based. Zine-makers do not just want to represent *the real* character of the city or neighborhoods in their zines, but also evolve with them and the people that live there in an organic and nuanced way that does not include making a profit or exploiting a certain place.

The migration of artist into poor neighborhoods is often thought of as the first step in a process of gentrification that ultimately unties the social fabric of a neighborhood. The impact of zine-makers' or DIY punks' presence in underserved neighborhoods is beyond the scope of this research, but their culture of using media the ways that they do and how it relates to the representations of those neighborhoods is not. As Zukin observes, media is frequently a tool that facilitates this displacement and rapid change. Within zine culture; however, a fairly young urban population uses zines to learn the social histories and characteristics of neighborhoods as experienced by others committed to DIY ethics. This is especially interesting given that many zine-makers in New Orleans have moved here since Katrina. Additional research could investigate the ways that and reasons why various groups of people have tried to establish roots in this region since the floods in 2005. More research could also explore the representations and urban narratives published by zine-makers in their zines, paying special attention to responses to gendered, economic, and built forms of the city.

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## Vita

Nathan Jessee was born in Mobile, Alabama. After attending University of New Orleans his freshman year, he eventually received his Bachelor's degree in Philosophy and English from the University of New Mexico. Nathan began the graduate program in urban studies at the University of New Orleans in 2008 with a focus in urban anthropology. Since 2000 Nathan has promoted shows, organized distros, volunteered at various DIY spaces, and played in punk bands in Albuquerque and New Orleans.